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C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT OF SPAIN 001214

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DEPT FOR WHA/CAR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/20/2016
TAGS: [KCRM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SNAR](#) [VZ](#) [TD](#)
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION LEADER: PM HAS TERRORIST LINKS, IS
ANTI-AMERICAN AND DICTATORIAL

REF: A. POS 01040

- [1](#)B. POS 01138
- [1](#)C. POS 01066
- [1](#)D. POS 00318
- [1](#)E. POS 00727
- [1](#)F. POS 00882

Classified By: Classified By: DCM Eugene P. Sweeney for reasons 1.4 (b)
) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) On October 3, the Ambassador met with Opposition United National Congress (UNC) Deputy Political Leader Senator Wade Mark, at Mark,s request. Mark said his purpose was to express to the Ambassador the UNC,s shock at the &sudden assault8 on the United States unleashed by Prime Minister Patrick Manning, in his September 5 address before energy industry executives and members of the diplomatic corps (Ref A). Mark wished to reassure the Ambassador that a UNC administration would reestablish with the US the same friendly and cooperative relations which has characterized the 1995-2001 period when then UNC Prime Minister Basdeo Panday and Secretary of State Warren Christopher signed an extradition treaty, a mutual legal assistance treaty and an agreement on maritime law enforcement. Mark went on to say that UNC concern with Manning,s &undiplomatic8 outburst was heightened by the fact that Minister of Energy and Energy Industries Dr. Lenny Saith has reportedly signed a memorandum of understanding with Mexico according to which a portion of the liquefied natural gas currently exported by T&T to the US would be assigned to Mexico instead. Such an action could not help but have serious national security implications for T&T, given that T&T depends for much of its food imports on the US. The Ambassador listened to Mark and acknowledged that the Prime Minister,s September 5 criticism of the US had taken him by surprise, too.

[1](#)2. (C) Mark then launched into a litany of allegations and rumors whose veracity it is impossible to gauge. He said it was the UNC,s understanding that newly-appointed foreign minister Arnold Piggott (Ref B) had, while serving as High Commissioner to Canada, met with elements associated with Al-Qaeda and Hezbollah. (Note: Post has no reason to believe that this is true and has not heard this rumor from any other source). He went on to say that three ships carrying rocket launchers as well as members of Hezbollah, which had left Syria in August en route to Argentina, were diverted to Venezuela,s Margarita island where a Hezbollah base was to be established with the aim of targeting the US. (Note: Post has heard this claim elsewhere, although embassy Caracas would be better placed to ascertain whether it is fact or fiction).

[1](#)3. (C) Mark also drew a connection between Prime Minister

Manning, Imam Yasin Abu Bakr, leader of the extremist Jamaat al Muslimeen (JAM) group, and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. Referring to Abu Bakr,s release from prison on bail and to his court-authorized leave to travel to Venezuela, Mark said it strains credulity that such a development could have taken place without the knowledge and intervention of the powers that be. Mark said that Abu Bakr is treated like a head of state by the Chavez regime, and hypothesized that his leave to travel to Venezuela could have been intended to cement Manning,s anti-American credentials in return for the JAM,s assistance with voter recruitment at the next election. (For info on Abu Bakr, see Reftels D, E, and F).

¶4. (C) Making full use of the exaggerated or rhetorical style which characterizes both his public appearances and private conversations, Mark then accused Prime Minister Manning of increasingly dictatorial tendencies. He said that Manning would stop at nothing including assassination, to get elected, and that the proposed draft constitution, which Manning commissioned and which incorporates no checks on the abuse of power by an executive president, is designed to suit his own predilection for absolute control.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: Wade Mark,s visit must be viewed in the context of an increasingly acrimonious political atmosphere in T&T, both between the ruling People,s National Movement and the opposition forces and within the opposition forces themselves recently split down the middle through the creation of Winston Dookeran,s Congress of the People (Ref C). Although many of Mark,s allegations seem outlandish, some of them may not be entirely implausible. On the one hand, the fact that the GOTT is prosecuting Abu Bakr for sedition, incitement and terrorism makes it highly unlikely that any deal is in the works between him and Manning. On the other hand, Abu Bakr,s leave to travel to Venezuela really does raise eyebrows. Post would appreciate any

insights which embassy Caracas may have on Abu Bakr,s activities in Venezuela.

AUSTIN